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MYTHOLOGY OF THE PRENATAL LIFE

This book first appeared in 1960 as a privately published monograph. It is a companion volume and sequel to *The Nature of the Self*, written in 1959 and re-published in 2012 by Starwalker Press. These two books represent the crowning achievement of the author, Francis J. Mott, a prolific writer whose work was far ahead of its time. During the 1970s, he corresponded with the influential and innovative psychiatrist R. D. Laing, who in turn studied and annotated a copy of *Mythology of the Prenatal Life*. Here, this unique material is published for the first time, in facsimile handwriting, so the reader can follow the thoughts and associations of R. D. Laing himself as he read through the text.

Francis J. Mott was born in England in 1901; in spite of ill-health as a child and little formal schooling, he showed a precocious intelligence which led him eventually to study the work of many controversial and innovative thinkers, some of whom he met in person. The list includes Otto Rank and Nandor Fodor, former protégés of Sigmund Freud, and among the first people to write about prenatal experience in a psychological and spiritual context. Francis J. Mott spent time in the USA and Canada, where he found the principal audience for his developing ideas concerning a universal pattern of creation in the natural world, which included human experience. He lectured, conducted group psychology and individual dream analysis, wrote and published several books. As a platform for this work, he founded a group which came to be known as 'The Society of Life'. He served in the Canadian Air Force in World War II, until his discharge in 1945 when he returned to England. In 1933 he married Gwendolen Mayhew, his support in every way until his death in 1980; they had two children.

Francis J. Mott was intellectually vigorous, pursuing with passion his research and publishing his writings until the last year of his life.

In writing *The Nature of the Self*, Francis J. Mott draws on extensive case material, particularly dreams, to unravel the mysteries of the world of pre- and perinatal experience, and to demonstrate how the residue of this realm is reflected in our post-natal life, in symptoms of various kinds – physical, emotional and mental. He also demonstrated how these intrauterine dynamics inform familiar symbolic and mythological themes. *Mythology of the Prenatal Life* takes this exploration further with extensive detail, etymology and anthropological references concerning well-known mythic motifs. Anyone interested in the development of human consciousness is sure to find Mott's work to be truly revelatory. Artists, poets, healers, psychoanalysts, mythology enthusiasts, anthropologists and students of symbolism will discover here a rich and completely new understanding of the inner dimensions of human experience.

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PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

Mythology of the Prenatal Life is the companion volume and sequel to *The Nature of the Self*, which is extensively referenced in the present volume, with page numbers noted in the text in square brackets. Familiarity with the material presented in *The Nature of the Self* will greatly enhance the reader's understanding and enjoyment of *Mythology of the Prenatal Life*, but for convenience, the author's main ideas are summarized in Appendix IV, in an edited version of his essay *Jacob's Ladder*.

Francis J. Mott's original foreword is included in full and unedited, in Appendix III. Here, he describes how, through his work analyzing dreams, he reached an understanding of the mind's nature which was nowhere to be found in the writings of Freud, Jung and other modern psychologists. This is as true today as it was then. For the mystery which was revealed to Mott concerns the hidden dynamics of the prenatal life, and how these are in turn repeated and reflected in postnatal life. In addition, this same 'Universal Design', as he called it, can be seen at various different levels of existence, from the sub-atomic, through the cellular, and also in the cosmic – from the microcosm to the macrocosm. He says, '... I was able to build up a sort of mosaic picture of the evolution of the individual mind'. These themes are explored extensively in *The Nature of the Self*.

Mott soon began to observe suggestive coincidences between this 'mosaic picture' and certain symbolic elements present in mythology, and he offers in *Mythology of the Prenatal Life* his elaboration of these themes, drawing extensively on the mythology of different cultures, anthropological material and biblical references. Mott was convinced that the symbolic content of dreams and myths tells the same story, namely the story of the evolution of the individual human mind as rooted in, but also transcending, the biological journey of gestation and birth, and onwards. The dream offers memory-fragments of that process, buried deep in the individual. The myth reflects those same memories, but given cultural and collective forms as they are projected into the social arena in order to give expression to the feelings which struggle in each individual mind. As well as a deeper understanding of personal and individual psychological processes, the understanding of Mott's work offers a deepened appreciation of the arts of story-

telling, image-making, dance and drama as expressed through the great variety of different national and cultural forms, down the ages.

Mott came to realize that what he had discovered was relevant to all mankind, both now and in its ancient history, as the generative root of mythology may be found in the internal evidence of the personal and subjective feelings. He says, 'Further, where historical reasons for the coalescence of gods and heroes are lacking, or where new associations or the acquisition of new attributes affront their historical origins, the basis upon which such developments were made can be revealed by understanding the dreamlike associative processes of the mind'.

Once the 'generative root of mythology' is seen, the incoherence of apparently disparate archetypal stories which involve the gods and goddesses of different cultures becomes transformed into an appreciation of the underlying unity of all life. In this book, the depth and breadth of Mott's understanding offers the reader an inspirational and revelatory journey through intriguing territory, well-known and unfamiliar at the same time.

CHAPTER ONE

The Myth of the Shining One

Scattered fragmentarily through human dreams, represented in the most diverse and superficially unlikely symbols, there lies the same testimony, which in the great myths is made sharp and clear. The most basic item of this testimony is that the unborn baby feels himself to be a shining nuclear focus lying within the sphere of the womb [9-17]. He feels that his skin is a coat of shining power [13] and that he is the veritable king of creation [83]. Yet he also feels that he occupies the magic cave of the womb with a mysterious twin, the placenta, who is at the same time lover and waste-pot, bloodsucker and restorer [18-42]. Into this mysterious twin he seems to plunge himself to be slain and renewed [27-28], and at the same time he feels that he pierces that twin with energy and is pierced by it in return [27]. All this is a superimposition of a cosmic configuration upon the flesh and blood of the uterine organism [16]. Dreams tell us what the cosmos impressed upon our flesh and blood, and myths do likewise. The uterine impression is the most basic, the most tremendous, and the one most emphatically presented in the myths. This great theme appears again and again in a myriad of symbolic forms, as illustrated by the instances which follow, which are by no means exhaustive. There is a vast work of synthesis yet to be done.

The first item which I shall adduce is the hymn to Zeus Diktaios, for knowledge of which I am indebted to the late Jane Harrison and her book *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion*. Zeus, the Father God of the ancient Greeks, was fabled to have been born on the island of Crete. Upon a Cretan mountain named Dikte there is a cave where Zeus was by legend born. On the eastern coast of Crete, near the ancient town of Palaikastro, there was a temple dedicated to Zeus Diktaios, or the Zeus born on Dikte. Near the ruins of this ancient temple, the relics of a stele were found, and upon this stele were found parts of the hymn to the god. I shall first reproduce as much of the hymn as remains to us, and then seek to analyze it in terms of the statements at the head of this chapter,

showing that Zeus was the Shining One, namely the unborn child bearing the impress of cosmic radiance. The hymn is the universal story of the feeling-drama which develops between the fetus and the placenta, which in turn becomes the instrument of the evocation of the soul from the cosmos [42]. Here are the translated relics of the Hymn to Zeus Diktaios:

Io, Kouros most Great, I give thee hail, Kronian, Lord of all that is wet and gleaming, thou art come at the head of thy Daimones. To Dikte for the Year, Oh, march, and rejoice in the dance and song, that we make to thee with harps and pipes mingled together, and sing as we come to a stand at thy well-fenced altar. For here the shielded Nurturers took thee, a child immortal, from Rhea, and with noise of beating feet hid thee away.

(Lacuna ...)

And the Horai began to be fruitful year by year and Dike to possess mankind, and all wild living things were held about by wealth-loving Peace. To us also leap for full jars, and leap for fleecy flocks, and leap for fields of fruit, and for hives to bring increase. Leap for our Cities, and leap for our sea-borne ships, and leap for our young citizens and for goodly Themis.¹

To find Zeus, the Father, hailed as 'Lord of all that is wet and gleaming' inevitably awakens the interest of one who, like myself, knows that the fetal skin feeling is constantly symbolized in dreams by light or fire [257-260]. It will be seen in the following pages that Zeus is not only 'Lord of the lightning' or 'Lord of the bright sky', but that his allied symbolism makes him patently a prime representative of the fetal skin feeling and its sense of 'shine'.

The supreme deity of the ancient Greeks, during their historical period at least, was Zeus. His name, referable to a root that means 'to shine', may be rendered 'the Bright One'.²

Jane Harrison admits that the phrase 'wet and gleaming' may be an imperfect rendering of the hymn: 'Almighty Gleam', she says, would be simple and good. This may be so, and for our present purpose 'Almighty Gleam' is enough, though it is true that 'wetness' is often allied with 'shine' in symbols derived from modern dreams, perhaps owing to the fact that the fetal skin feeling is evoked in the waters of the amnion. Hence my tentative assumption that this Diktean Zeus is the representation of the fetal skin feeling, and what follows will not contradict it. Jane Harrison writes:

The opening words of the hymn are enough to startle the seven mythological sleepers ...

because they presume to address Zeus as 'Kouros most Great', which could be translated as the 'greatest of grown-up youths'. She continues:

To our unaccustomed ears the title sounds strange and barely reverent. 'Father,' and still more 'Mother,' and even 'Babe' are to us holy words, but a full-grown youth has to us no connotation of sanctity ... (The word) 'Kouros' connotes no relationship with a parent, it is simply 'young man just come to maturity'.³

To invoke the Father as 'the greatest of young men just come to maturity' must seem odd to anyone who does not realize that the fetal skin feeling (the 'Almighty Gleam'!) is in fact the essence of the most primary maleness and of father feeling [175]. Once we understand this, we can see that the invocation to Zeus Diktaios is an effort to invoke in the depths of the self the nuclear power of the cosmos as evoked by the fetal skin. The 'Lord of Gleam' is the essence of that maleness so adequately expressed by the feelings and behavior of a young man just come to maturity. It is the essence of the fetal skin feeling.

The fetus generates the sense of nuclear skin feeling by sympathetic resonance with the cosmos. This feeling is the essence of what will be known to the child after birth as 'maleness'. It is the feeling also of light, of fire or, if you will, of 'gleam'. This Diktean Zeus, whose worship evokes these titles of primal maleness, gleaming and universal fatherhood is none other than the representative (the projection!) of the fetal skin feeling and its cosmic memories. The men and women who sang this hymn were not 'primitives'. Their origins already had a long history, obscured by the mixing of many tribal bloods. Their conscious minds had lost the direct sense of the fetal skin feeling and its cosmic elements, but they had not yet arrived at the stage where they would try, by high philosophic abstraction, to gain an intellectual sense of God. All they could do was to grope back through their feelings to the memory of the fetal skin feeling – to the primal sense of 'The Gleaming One' who was all male (*kouros*) – and through this to intuit the sense of the universal Father, the cosmic Nucleus, whose imprint the fetal self has taken on [83].

APPENDIX IV

Jacob's Ladder

Outline of the Discovery of a Concrete Energy Link Between the Human Head and the Sky

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By the use of precise methods of analysis, I have probed beneath the surface of the human mind and feelings. What I discovered there is not only new and startling, but also old and familiar. This sounds at first like an insoluble paradox, but it is easily resolved when we realize that the modern mind sees things quite differently from the ancient mind. Even the minds of our recent forebears, like those of rural peoples, differ from the sharp, logical minds of our time. Therefore, older living people may have an understanding of these ideas in a way that has lost its significance for us. Our ancestors expressed things in symbolic terms different from the language we would use, and in seeking to equate them we discover what is both new, yet also familiar.

In this essay, I propose to briefly outline one particular aspect of my rediscoveries: *the fact that there is a stream of subtle energy circulating between the human head and the sky, and also a stream of subtle energy circulating between the human trunk and the earth.* These circulations of energy are today mostly unknown to the adult mind, but they are evidently known in early childhood. In the depths of our minds we nurture a memory of them – we are still in some way conscious of them, or of their potentiality. These circulations are an integral part of our deeper selves, and no doubt are vital

mechanisms of what has been called the soul. They represent, in effect, aspects of the anatomy of the soul, or so I judge them to be.

The reason we know nothing of these deeper functions of the soul is presumably because we have come in practice, if not in theory and philosophical speculation, to identify ourselves with the complex sensations, reactions and social semantics which fill the waking consciousness. Yet everything points to the possibility that the very self that senses, reacts and semanticizes is also the product of the very circulations outlined in this essay. This self, the product of processes now become unconscious in the normal adult, makes thought possible but is not itself composed of thinking elements, or anything normally associated with mind and thinking. It seems that the human being feels himself involved in a struggle between two antithetical forces, one of which acts downward upon the human head, while the other acts upward from the earth upon the trunk. Here we see the very same thing that our forebears sought to identify when they spoke of God being 'up in the sky', the Devil being 'under the earth', and of a war going on between God and Devil over the soul of man.

The Origins of the Human Energy Pattern

These two circulations, between the human head and the sky and also between the human trunk and the earth, though antithetical in their subjective influence upon the human character, appear to be of the same order.¹³⁰ They are also obedient to the same pattern. Each affects the other, and both show signs of a common origin, namely *in the pattern of the blood flow in the umbilical cord*. Both are 'haunted' by the organic memories of this umbilical flow. It seems that the basic energy of the human soul is generated or evoked in the umbilical cord, and that the pattern of the flow of blood in the cord somehow sets the pattern of all bodily energy.

The human umbilical cord is normally composed of *three* blood vessels; a more or less straight vein which carries the refreshed fetal blood from the placenta to the fetus, and two arteries helically twisted around the vein, which carry the vitiated fetal blood from the fetus to the placenta, for purification and refreshment. This fetal blood flows in a closed circuit, having no direct contact with the maternal blood. It takes what it needs from the mother's blood through the

thin placental tissues, and in the same manner surrenders the fetal waste to the mother's blood for excretion by her. In addition to the biological facts concerning umbilical circulation, we find that this fetal-placental circulation may be the agent for the generation or evocation of a subtler form of energy which persists after birth by transferring itself to other organs. This in turn imposes its pattern upon every flow of matter and physical energy into and out from the human body. Thus, the pattern of the umbilical flow (a single inflow opposed by two helical outflows) persists in every activity of the born organism.

Since the placenta and umbilical cord were evolved ages ago by the first placental mammals, their purpose being the feeding and detoxification of the embryo, one may assume that organs created for one purpose have had another superimposed upon them. Indeed, this is common in the evolution of the animal organism. Thus, for instance, the tongue was originally a digestive organ, but has also become an organ of speech. The evidence of dream analysis, confirmed by mythology, shows a metaphysical function superimposed upon the umbilical circulation. This is as distinct from its original purpose as the tongue's role in speech is distinct from its original digestive role. The mechanism whereby this metaphysical umbilical function has evolved is unknown to me at present. It cannot be a neural energy, since the umbilical cord is not innervated save for a few millimeters beyond the navel. It is difficult to see how the nervous system could register the helical twist in the cord, and yet this is the aspect of the energy pattern which persists most impressively in the behaviour patterns of the postnatal organism. It seems to follow that the blood itself must in some way register the pattern of its flow back and forth along the cord, though how it does this I cannot at present conceive. One thing is certain: no normal human being ever loses this umbilical energy or the pattern associated with it. Physically, the placenta and the umbilical cord are temporary fetal appendages, expendable after birth. However, the energy and the pattern of feeling to which they refer are never lost. However, as they transfer after birth into a variety of surrogate forms, we all feel to have the lost placenta and umbilical cord inside us.

The postnatal organism must accommodate the functions formerly administered by the placenta and the cord: breathing,